In the Preſs, and ſpeedily will be publiſhed,

THREE DISSERTATIONS

ON

LIFE AND DEATH.

I. A Survey of the Brevity and Vanity of Human Life, with the Conſolation adminiſtered by the Chriſtian Syſtem againſt both.

II. Conſiderations on St. *Paul*'s Wiſh to depart and be with *Chriſt*. With an Appendix on the *intermediate State*.

III. Death a *Bleſſing* to the good Man.

By WILLIAM JONES,

Rector of *Pluckley*, in *Kent*.

THREE DISSERTATIONS

ON

LIFE AND DEATH.

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A

DISSERTATION

ON THE

OFFERING up of ISAAC

BY

ABRAHAM.

By WILLIAM JONES,
RECTOR of PLUCKLEY, in KENT.

LONDON,
Printed for G. ROBINSON, in Pater-noſter-Row.
MDCCLXXII.

A DISSERTATION

ON THE

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DISSERTATION, &c.

1. THE command of God, and the aſſent of *Abraham*, with reſpect to the offering up of *Iſaac*, are things not very eaſy to be reconciled with our notions of wiſdom and rectitude, if the differences and miſtakes of learned men concerning any particular queſtion are proofs of its obſcurity. The whole affair, conſidered in itſelf, is indeed not very eaſy to be underſtood, and hath but an unpromiſing aſpect. Yet it happens ſometimes, that where the earth has a barren appearance at the ſurface, and is deformed with naked rocks, and frightful precipices, it is rich underneath with veins of precious ore. The traveller, who paſſes careleſsly over the face of ſuch a country, will perhaps ſee nothing

but what is ungrateful to the ſight; but the more patient miner, whoſe profeſſion it is to ſearch for hidden treaſure, becomes acquainted with its value. However, as no perſon engaged in ſuch a difficult employment can proſecute his work in ſubterraneous darkneſs, he takes a light down with him in his hand to direct him. And if we are deſirous of working to any good effect upon the matter before us, we muſt uſe a light proper to the occaſion; which is that of Revelation itſelf. We examine every ſubject by the principles and data of that ſcience to which it properly belongs. No reaſonable man finds himſelf leſſening in his own opinion, becauſe he views natural objects by the rays of the ſun, which God hath appointed for that purpoſe. By parity of reaſon, he that would rightly diſtinguiſh ſuperior things, muſt be content to examine them by a ſuperior light. And the judgment he forms under ſuch circumſtances will be the judgment of reaſon. For what is reaſon, but that faculty in the mind, which determines the fitneſs or unfitneſs of any thing, by conſidering it in a rational manner, with its own peculiar dependences and relations?

II. Yet

II. Yet ſome have ſuppoſed (as we may infer from their proceedings) that the thing they call Reaſon requires juſt the contrary: that the ſubjects of the Bible ought to be ſevered from the Bible in which they are found, and held up to be examined by a light foreign to themſelves in the human underſtanding. But this method muſt be very fallacious. For if the light of the mind leads to contrary determinations in different perſons, as it is found to do on very many occaſions, its exiſtence as a natural light will at leaſt become doubtful. When different perſons view the ſame object by day-light, they all agree as to its figure, magnitude, diſtance, colour, and other external properties. And it would be wonderful if they were to diſagree, when they all view it through the ſame common medium, and with a like organ of viſion. But if we try the ſame perſons at intellectual or ſpiritual objects, they will differ ſo widely as to demonſtrate that the two caſes are not parallel; that they do not view theſe objects by the ſame light, nor with the ſame inſtrument. Some receive what others reject; ſome admire what others abhor; and ſome believe what others deny. But this diverſity could never

happen, amongſt people as yet in their ſenſes, if the colours of good and evil were ſelf-evident, as the colours of material objects: that is, if the optics of the mind were as naturally prepared to judge, as the eye is to ſee; and there were any light naturally preſent, and common to all underſtandings.

III. There will be great convenience in condeſcending to take this matter as it really is. We ſhall then be no longer diſtreſſed with endeavouring to ſupport an imaginary dignity; which if we are not qualified to ſupport, we ſhall only ſink the lower into intellectual poverty by attempting it.

The human mind is a mirror, which, like other mirrors, has no light inherent in itſelf, but reflects images as they are illuminated by an exterior medium. It doth not make the images it reflects, but returns ſuch as are already made, and is rather receptive than productive. Nature will undoubtedly occaſion ſome diverſity in the qualities of the metal; yet it borrows its figure and its poliſh from education. If its figure is falſe, or its poliſh imperfect, it will repreſent that as obſcure, diſtorted, and monſtrous, which in itſelf is bright, regular and beautiful. And, on the other hand, it will give beauty and regularity

to a diſorderly confuſed object, whoſe lineaments are accommodated to the extravagances of its own ſurface. Hence it hath come to paſs, that different minds have made ſo many contradictory reflections about the ſame thing. What the Chriſtian underſtood as a grand example of the wiſdom and power of God, was to the Jew a ſtumbling-block, and to the Greek fooliſhneſs. The Chriſtian examined it by the principles of Revelation, and therefore he was perſuaded of it, and embraced it. But the Jew was taught by the traditions of his church, to truſt in the outward ceremonies of the Law for juſtification, and to expect temporal honours as the beſt gifts of God to his choſen people. The Greek was full of rhetoric, ſtoical pride, and philoſophic novelty; ready to reject every thing as mean and trifling, if unattended with the ornaments of ſpeech, and the pomp of ſcience. How was it poſſible for minds, ſo differently prepared, to agree in their opinion about any matter of importance, wherein the various principles of each were nearly intereſted? The Jew was earthly and ſtupid, and looked *into* nothing; the Greek was proud and affected, and looked *above* every thing: and ſo neither

of them had any reliſh for the revealed wiſdom of God. Fooliſhneſs in the form of ſuperſtition poſſeſſed the one; and as great fooliſhneſs in the form of pedantry blinded the other.

No diſcoveries can be made in the ſcripture, till we have put away the prejudices both of the Jew and the Greek; that ſo we may be at liberty to examine a ſubject of the ſcripture, with the help of ſuch information as the ſcripture itſelf will afford us. And I hope what I have ſaid, though ſeemingly foreign to my ſubject, will be accepted as a ſufficient apology for what ſome may account a low and vulgar method of inveſtigation: ſuch a method, however, as I wiſh to follow on every occaſion that requires it, as I am perſuaded the preſent doth in a particular manner.

IV. The command of God to Abraham, in relation to the offering of his ſon Iſaac, occurs in the twenty-ſecond chapter of Geneſis, and is thus worded: *Take now thy ſon, thine only ſon Iſaac, whom thou loveſt, and get thee into the Land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.* Every circumſtance is here comprehended, which

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can heighten the ſeverity of this command on the part of God, together with the hardſhip and ſorrow that muſt attend a compliance with it on the part of Abraham: and the more attentively we conſider this trial, the harder it will appear.

The caſe was this: God had appeared to Abraham under the Oaks of Mamre, and, with all the ſolemnity of a divine exhibition, had aſſured him that Sarah, who till that time had been barren, and was now very far advanced in years, ſhould bring forth a ſon. In this ſon, all the nations of the Earth were to be bleſſed: his poſterity was to be as innumerable as the ſtars of Heaven, and as the ſand upon the ſea-ſhore: which promiſe, according to St. Paul's application of it, was originally ſo expreſſed, as to include the perſon of the expected Meſſiah, that promiſed *ſeed*, who in the latter days was actually born of the family of Abraham.

The circumſtance on which all theſe great things depended, did accordingly come to paſs. Sarah brought forth her ſon Iſaac, who grew up towards manhood, while his parents were happy under a perſuaſion, that in him all the promiſes of God would in due time be accompliſhed.

Things being thus diſpoſed, the *Angel of the Lord* appears to Abraham, and commands him to *offer his ſon for a burnt offering*: an action ſhocking in itſelf, and apparently much worſe in its conſequences. For the promiſe of a bleſſing, as wide as the whole world, depended on the life of Iſaac; and if we ſuppoſe him changed into a burnt offering, how is the truth of God to be juſtified? How is the Meſſiah to be born? How is the world to be redeemed? Theſe are queries, which obtrude themſelves with ſome clamour, and are very hard to be anſwered.

But let us not be diſcouraged. The ſubject will ſoon wear a better face: for if we view this tranſaction, with its motives, circumſtances, iſſues, and prophetical ſignatures, (all of which muſt be taken into the account) we ſhall not only ſee the truth and juſtice of God acquitted, but ſhall underſtand the whole as an additional argument of the divine wiſdom and mercy. In the proſecution of this enquiry, our firſt ſtep muſt be to aſk, with what deſign God commanded Abraham to offer up his ſon?

V. After the flood, the church and the true religion were continued in the family of

of *Shem*: for in the other ſons of Noah, particularly in *Ham*, the ſame principles of infidelity which had corrupted the old world, began to work afreſh in the new; ſo that at the expiration of the firſt century after the flood (if we take the naming of *Peleg* as a memorial of the tranſaction) a ſcheme of apoſtacy was ſet on foot at *Babel*, or, as the Greek verſion calls it, *Babylon*. That there was a change in religion at the time of the diſperſion from *Babel* is highly probable on all accounts; and the ſcripture ſeems to contain ſome evident marks of ſuch an event. The denomination of the *children of Heber*, or *Hebrews*, as diſtinguiſhing the true believers from the Gentiles, and which took place at this time, is one mark of it. A ſecond is the character we have of *Babylon* in the Revelation of St. *John*; for it could not properly be aſſumed to denote a *mother* of religious *abominations* in the *myſtical* ſenſe, unleſs itſelf had originally been ſuch in the literal. A third, and a plainer mark than either of the foregoing, is the fact; that from this time we cannot with certainty find any religion amongſt the deſcendants of *Ham* and *Japheth*, but that of idolatry.

From

From the time of the diſperſion at *Babel*, two parts of the world out of three were gone off to heatheniſm: and as falſehood is more alluring than truth, and generally more ſucceſsful in its zeal, through the corruption it has to work upon, idolatry would ſoon gather many proſelytes from the poſterity of *Heber*. Such was the rapidity of its progreſs, that in leſs than three hundred years from the flood, the Progenitors of *Abraham* were infected with this growing evil, and are ſaid to have *ſerved other Gods* *.

The divine mercy therefore, having regard to the ſucceeding generations, judged it neceſſary to ſeparate from the world ſome one individual of the *children of Heber*, for the preſervation of the faith and the practice of true religion; both of which were now like to be extirpated by the prevailing influence of idolatry.

VI. Abraham was the perſon ſelected of God for this purpoſe. He was called to be the father of the church of the Hebrews, and of that promiſed ſeed which was to *bruiſe the head of the Serpent*. But as faith and righteouſneſs are the marks which have

* Joſh. xxiv, 2.

always

always diſtinguiſhed the members of the church from the children of this world, it was expedient that the perſon, ſo called of God, ſhould be eminent as an example of both to all his poſterity. With this view divine providence was training him up, under the ſevere diſcipline of a long and ſolemn probation. For though he is able to ſearch the heart, and read all the ſecrets of it, he requires nevertheleſs, that the inward ſtate of the mind ſhould always be made manifeſt by ſome outward acts, for the perfecting of his ſaints, and for an example to thoſe who come after. Abraham is ſuppoſed to have *believed* in the true God from the beginning: and faith is an excellent virtue, without which no other virtue can ſtand, and upon which every other may be built. Yet the only acceptable faith, is that which *worketh by love*. Some men may think well; ſome may ſpeak well; and others may both think and ſpeak as their duty requires: yet they may eaſily fail when their thoughts and their words are to be reduced to action. This is the ſureſt trial of their ſincerity: and if the heart of man may ſo far impoſe upon itſelf as to think its attainments higher than they are, ſome *fact* is neceſſary to convince

it

it of its miſtake, and thereby lead it forward to greater degrees of perfection.

VII. On this conſideration, as well as on ſome others, it was neceſſary that the facts of Abraham's life ſhould agree with the profeſſion of his underſtanding: and indeed all profeſſions are vain ſo long as they want this ſeal of perfection. Therefore he was commanded to *get out from* his *country*, *and from* his *kindred*, and from *his father's houſe*, *unto a land* which God would *ſhew unto him**. The *land* was not pointed out to him by name, that it might be an object of faith, not of knowledge. For they, who are inclined to follow God no farther than their own knowledge will give them aſſurance about the way, neither know themſelves, nor the nature of obedience, nor the majeſty of that Being by whom they are called; and however great they may appear in their own eſtimation, they are too little for his purpoſes. The holy Patriarch was of another diſpoſition. He *obeyed*, *and went out*, *not knowing whither he went* †. His obedience being regulated by a principle of *faith*, he reſigned himſelf up to the diſpoſal of God,

* Gen, xii. 1. † Heb. xi. 8.

without

without knowing how he was to be diſpoſed of. Reaſon and faith, though different in themſelves, are by no means inconſiſtent; becauſe it is every way fit and rational for any creature to give itſelf up abſolutely to the direction of its Creator. Reaſon, without faith, will ſtand queſtioning; and unleſs it can firſt be ſatisfied as to the ends and iſſues of things, and reconcile the means with its own preconceptions, it will refuſe to be directed. But here to Abraham neither the end nor the means were fully opened. The command of God was propoſed for his obedience; and he knowing it to be impoſſible for the will of a Being infinitely perfect to have any end but a good one in view, or to purſue it by inſufficient means, aſſented to the will of God, and followed it, without thinking it neceſſary for him to foreſee the whole ſeries of its operations. He was content, if it ſhould ſo pleaſe God, to ſpend his whole life upon earth in a ſtate of ſuſpenſe and dependence, and to live upon expectation.

VIII. The land to which he was called, proved at length to be the land of Canaan; a land promiſed to himſelf and to *his ſeed* after him,

him, *when as yet he had no child.** Here he *ſojourned*, as a paſſenger in a ſtrange country. He had reached the expected land; yet found it no ſeat of enjoyment, but only a new ſtation, from whence his faith might ſtill look forward: for not long after his arrival, *a famine* † rendered it uninhabitable, and he was obliged to remove for a ſeaſon into Egypt. The traveller, who is paſſing through an unknown road, may imagine that the ſummit of the next hill will preſent to his ſight the end and object of his journey; but when he has reached it, he finds it ſucceeded by another, much more remote, and muſt wait with patience for a better proſpect.

That Canaan itſelf was offered to Abraham only as a ſtage in the way of his pilgrimage, and that he accepted it in no other capacity, is clear from his manner of uſing it. He founded no city there; he built no towering capitol; he raiſed no fortifications: but *builded an altar unto the Lord who had appeared unto him* ‡, and dwelled in *tabernacles* †, or moveable tents; not aſſuming the form of the prince or the ſoldier, but of the ſhepherd and the pilgrim; of one who had

* Acts vii. 5. ‡ Gen. xii. 10. † Ibid. ver. 7. || Heb. xi. 9.

no

no fixed habitation in this world, but was a *ſtranger upon earth*, waiting for an heavenly inheritance, a true Canaan, a land worth enjoying, with *a city that hath foundations, whoſe builder and maker is God.**

IX. The degenerate children of Abraham, with whom St. *Stephen* argued in his apology, were urged with the example of their great forefather; the nature of whoſe tenure was diſplayed ſo clearly, and inſiſted upon ſo eloquently from the words of their Law; that when they compared their own ſordid ſentiments with the holineſs and ſublimity of his profeſſion, as the diſcourſe of St. *Stephen* in a manner forced them to do, they were not able to endure the contraſt. They had fixed their hearts upon their *place and nation*, as they called it. Their country, their temple, and a deliverance from Roman tax-gatherers, were the important objects of their devotion. But the Martyr ſhewed them, they could find no precedent for ſuch an attachment in the calling and conduct of their father Abraham; that even the conſummation of the promiſe to his poſterity, ſo far as it related to this preſent world, did never ſignify a ſtate

* Hebr. xi. 10.

of

of poſſeſſion and enjoyment, but only an opportunity of *ſerving God* with freedom and ſecurity, in a land remote from their enemies and oppreſſors; that after all the excellent things ſpoken of Canaan, it was but a *ſtrange* land to the heirs of Abraham's faith. What Egypt was with reſpect to Canaan, a land of ſervitude and exile, ſuch was Canaan itſelf compared with the *heavenly* country they had in view.

X. In the intermediate ages, the patriarchal example was adopted by the *Rechabites*‡, a family in Iſrael, which diſtinguiſhed itſelf by a conformity to the life of Abraham. To the circumſtances of *dwelling in tents*, and having neither vineyards, fields, nor poſſeſſions of any kind, they added a religious abſtinence from *wine*; aſpiring to the holineſs of the *Nazarites*, and to that purity which afterwards appeared in the abſtracted character of John the Baptiſt. To thoſe who have renounced this world, nothing remains but the world to come: whence it may be inferred that they who were ſo like to the holy Patriarch in their practice, and had his example to direct them, could not be unlike

‡ Jerem. xxxv. 6. 7.

him

him in their principle: but from this principle the modern Jews had departed ſo far, that they had even loſt the ſight of it.

XI. In the ſucceeding intercourſe of God with Abraham, the ſame method is ſtill obſerved, of proving his fidelity by ſome experiment upon his Faith. Therefore the promiſe of *Iſaac*'s birth was deferred, till the prediction ſhould have nothing to ſupport it, but the power and veracity of God. A Son might have been granted at the natural time of life, and have anſwered all the purpoſes of the promiſe: but a child from a man *as good as dead*, and from a woman who had always been *barren*, and was now *ninety years of age*, would better anſwer the purpoſe of God with reſpect to Abraham himſelf. *This is the word of promiſe*, ſaith the Apoſtle, *at this time will I come and Sarah ſhall have a ſon**: at a *time*, when the bleſſing could not be expected in the common courſe of nature; and when that wiſdom, which partaketh more of earth than of heaven, would have rejected the expectation of it as groundleſs and irrational. But Abraham *ſtaggered not at the promiſe of God through unbelief*. What

* Rom. ix. 9.

though a child from ſuch parents was like life from death? as a lily or a roſe ſpringing out of froſt and ſnow? It was therefore both a proper and a probable gift from that *God, who quickneth the dead, and calleth thoſe things which be not as though they were* *.

XII. The firſt object of our enquiry, was the *deſign* with which God commanded Abraham to offer up his Son: and this, I think, may now be inferred from what we have already ſeen: for all the other trials of the Patriarch were but preparatory to this. The deſign which was there begun, is here brought to its criſis and completion. On this occaſion only, God is ſaid to have *tempted* him, that is, to have tried and proved him to the uttermoſt: becauſe this occaſion differs from the other, as the fire of the Refiner differs from the Touchſtone: and unleſs the metal is firſt made to diſcover its royal nature by ſome ſlighter experiments, no good can be expected from caſting it into the furnace.

XIII. The matter of this *Temptation* divides itſelf into two parts; 1. The act of offering Iſaac; and, 2. The loſs of the promiſes, which ſeemed to be the neceſſary con-

* See Rom. iv. 17, &c.

ſequence.

ſequence. In the act itſelf there was a concurrence of every circumſtance that could add to the weight of it. For in the firſt place, the birth of Iſaac at a ſeaſon ſo unexpected would engage the affection as much as it exerciſed the faith of his parents. I ſpeak not of that partiality which is natural in parents towards the children of their later years; becauſe that conſideration was ſuperſeded by another of much higher importance: for Iſaac was more properly a child of grace than of nature; to whom thoſe words of *Eve* might well be applied—*I have gotten a man from the Lord.*

But he was likewiſe an only ſon—*take now thy ſon, thine* only *ſon Iſaac.* Abraham had no other to be the companion of his age. We ſee Jacob afterwards in the deepeſt affliction with the apprehenſion of loſing *Benjamin,* though he had many other ſons. When his brethren required him to go with them to Egypt, *My ſon,* ſaid he, *ſhall not go down with you; for his brother is dead and he is left alone. If miſchief befall him by the way in which ye go, then ſhall ye bring down my grey hairs with ſorrow to the grave.* Every tender reader, eſpecially if he is a parent, ſuffers with Jacob, and feels the weight of

his fears and ſorrows. What *ſearchings of heart* then muſt Abraham have experienced, when this act of obedience was firſt propoſed to him! Natural affection, where an only child is the object of it, is a principle which ſometimes operates ſo powerfully as to get the better of every other: and that it operated in Abraham as in other men, is clear enough from the words of the ſcripture —*take now thy ſon, thine only ſon Iſaac, whom thou loveſt.* He was probably grown up to that ſtate, when a ſon is not only an amuſement to a father, but a comfort and ſupport, a friend and companion. Some of the Jewiſh Doctors ſuppoſe him to have been at this time thirteen years of age; but *Joſephus*,* perhaps with better authority, five and twenty. Such a ſon, arrived at years of diſcretion, muſt have endeared himſelf by many acts of duty and affection. His ſubmiſſion on this occaſion, and the piety of his riper years, give us reaſon enough to conclude, that his life had been a courſe of unreſerved obedience.

* Joſeph. Lib. II. c. xxii. It is no objection to this that Iſaac is called *a lad*; for *Iſhmael* is ſo called at ſixteen years or upwards, and *Benjamin* after he was married. Compare Gen. xliv. 30, and xlvi. 21.

This

This is the ſon which Abraham was called upon to reſign: and how? not in the common way of nature, but by a violent death, as the Lamb is carried to the ſlaughter: and, leſt any circumſtance of ſorrow ſhould be wanting, the Father himſelf was the prieſt appointed to offer this victim. For three days, that is, during his journey to the place appointed, his mind was agitated with the force of the divine precept on one ſide, and natural affection on the other. The temptation ſeems to have been purpoſely protracted by the length of the way, and the aſcent of an high mountain, that there might be ſpace enough for faith and affection, the fear of God and the love of the world, the expectation of things future and the deſire of things preſent; for all the paſſions of grace and nature to exert their utmoſt efforts.

XIV. If it ſhould here be aſked, how we can reconcile this command with the *nature of God?* I muſt confeſs I know not, unleſs we take the *nature of man* alſo into the queſtion. By the act of man's diſobedience, the whole world fell into a ſtate of forfeiture; or, as the Apoſtle hath expreſſed it, *death paſſed upon all:* and though the goodneſs of

God, having provided a ranſom, did on that conſideration releaſe the world from the extreme effects of his juſtice; yet an acknowledgment of this univerſal condemnation was required from the time that ſacrifices were inſtituted. The law of Moſes was declaratory of a right which had ſubſiſted from the beginning, when *Abel* brought off the *firſtlings* of his flock.* For the firſt born of *men*, a pecuniary redemption of five ſhekels was accepted: the firſt born of clean beaſts were to be offered by fire, and their blood ſprinkled upon the altar: the firſt born of the unclean were to be redeemed by a price, as being unfit for conſecration. The firſt born of Egypt were taken in kind; their redemption being precluded by their unbelief.

Therefore if *every* firſt born was the Lord's by right, *Iſaac* was ſo: and if a commutation was an indulgence, the rigour of the Law might be obſerved without any breach of Juſtice; eſpecially by Him, who, for the ſalvation of the world, permited this inſtitution to take place againſt his *beloved* and *only begotten Son*; who having ſuperſeded the oblation of the firſt born of beaſts, and offered

* Gen. iv. 4.

a price

a price more valuable than Silver and Gold, to redeem the firſt-born of men, is himſelf become *the firſt born of every creature:* he hath redeemed all, and taken the place of all, by a ſubſtitution of himſelf. This is what occurs, when we conſider the nature of God, and the nature of his command, without any regard to its iſſue: for there is a difficulty in the precept, which vaniſhes in the performance, and renders theſe reflections unneceſſary.

XV. But now, if we return to Abraham, we ſhall find another difficulty: for how afflicting ſoever the death of his ſon may appear to us, it was to him but the ſmaller part of the trial. In this ſon the promiſes of God were to be accompliſhed; all the nations of the earth were to be bleſſed in him; the Saviour of the world was to be born of his race: ſo that upon his life the future redemption of mankind depended, and the univerſal bleſſing of a reſurrection from the dead. All theſe things were to proceed from Iſaac, the only ſon of Abraham, and the veracity of God was pledged to ſee them all fulfilled. The knot which is to be untied is now before us. For how could Iſaac be put to death, without falſifying the word of God

by cutting off the poſſibility of fulfilling his promiſe? Nothing need be added to increaſe the perplexity of this matter: the contradiction is plain and ſtriking, and ſeems to be inſurmountable. Yet faith, which can level all things, found a way of removing the difficulty; and thus it reaſoned—that if God had given a promiſe, it was utterly incredible that he ſhould retract it—that nothing was *too hard for the Lord*, as experience had already ſhewed—that *what he had promiſed he was able alſo to perform*—that therefore, whatever the preſent appearances might threaten, Iſaac ſhould ſtill be the ſource of the promiſed bleſſing, and the divine veracity ſhould be preſerved inviolate, though he were ſacrificed upon the altar. But how could this poſſibly be, without his reſurrection from the dead? No other method was left: and faith being reduced to this ſtrait, believed the doctrine, and ſolved the difficulty. God had not ſo far revealed himſelf to Abraham, as to give him reaſon to think this would be the reſult, neither indeed was it ſo intended; but his own faith led him up to it. "That God may be true, (ſaid he) *that* ſhall be, which never yet hath been: a man, even Iſaac, now going to be offered,

ſhall be raiſed up to life: the God who at his birth gave him Being from parents dead in age, ſhall now fulfil his promiſe by reſtoring him from Death itſelf." That he reaſoned with himſelf and concluded to this effect, appears both from the teſtimony of St. Paul, and from the terms of the hiſtory in the book of Geneſis. *By faith*, ſays the Apoſtle, *Abraham when he was* tried *offered up Iſaac; and he that had* received the promiſes, *offered up his* only begotten ſon, *of whom it was ſaid that in* Iſaac *ſhall thy ſeed be called: accounting that God was able to* RAISE *him up even from the* DEAD*. The hiſtory itſelf, in the book of Geneſis, informs us, that when he was within ſight of the place where his ſon was to be offered, he ſaid to his young men "Abide you here—and I and the lad will go yonder, and worſhip, and come again to you." But ſuppoſing him to have been offered for a burnt-offering, as his father then believed he would be, how could it be ſaid they would *come again*, unleſs he was perſuaded of Iſaac's reſurrection? It would be unnatural to take this expreſſion as an evaſion, and to imagine that the holy Patriarch could

* Heb. xi. 17.

con-

condeſcend to trifle with his ſervants, when his ſoul was in travail with ſuch an affair as this; therefore, I am inclined to think, he expected the reſurrection of his ſon, not as a diſtant, but as an immediate bleſſing.

XVI. Under this perſuaſion, though ſurely not without ſome fluctuation of thought, ſome ſhare of thoſe tumultuous emotions of the mind, which are inſeparable from the condition of humanity, he aſcended the mountain, laid his ſon upon the altar, and ſtretched forth his hand to ſlay him: but in that inſtant, the angel of the Lord called to him and ſaid, *Lay not thine hand upon the lad —for now I know that thou feareſt God*—It never was the deſign of God that he ſhould be put to death; but it was expedient that Abraham ſhould think ſo, that it might appear whether his virtue could endure ſo ſevere a trial; and now, the end was anſwered. The inquiſition having been kept up with rigour, and the juſtice of God being ſatisfied with the abſolute reſignation of his ſervant, now made *perfect through ſufferings*; Mercy takes up the cauſe, and accepts the purpoſe inſtead of the performance.

At the ſame time, it was ſo ordered by the providence of God, that *a ram was caught in*

in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went ond took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering inſtead of his ſon. Thus it came to paſs, that a real ſacrifice was offered; while Iſaac, the intended one, was raiſed from the altar, as a perſon received from the dead. St. *Paul* inſtructs us to underſtand his deliverance as a figurative reſurrection, a prelude to the reſurrection of *Jeſus Chriſt*. *Abraham*, he ſaith, *accounted that God was able to raiſe him up even from the dead*; and then adds, *from whence alſo he received him in a figure*;* εν παραβολη, in *a parable*, where the things *ſpoken of* are deſcriptive of things *underſtood*. The perſon of Iſaac, his impending death, and unexpected deliverance, are the things ſpoken of: the perſon of Chriſt, his actual ſacrifice, and his reſurrection which followed, are the things underſtood. It will readily be admitted, that the reſurrection of Iſaac was *parabolic*, or deſcriptive of ſomething beyond itſelf, if it ſhould appear, that all the other lines of his character point as directly to the Meſſiah, as the rays of a circle to its center: and our labour will not be loſt, if we review it with this intention.

* Hebr. xi. 19.

XVII. In

XVII. In the appellation, *ſeed of Abraham*, there is an ambiguity, which implies a ſimilitude between *Iſaac* the immediate, and *Chriſt* the more remote *ſon of Abraham*. If we apply the expreſſion to an individual, who can be underſtood by it but Iſaac? yet the apoſtle applies it to the perſon of the Meſſiah; affirming, that the covenant with Abraham and *his ſeed*, was the *covenant confirmed of God in Chriſt**, and that Chriſt himſelf was the ſeed intended in the terms of the promiſe.

The birth both of the one and the other was announced by an immediate Revelation from Heaven, and was in either caſe above the laws of nature: ſo that when *Sarah* was forewarned of Iſaac's birth, and *Mary* of the birth of Chriſt, the thing appeared incredible to both, and occaſioned a ſimilar expoſtulation. *Sarah* ſaid, *Shall I of a ſurety bear a child, which am old?* And the bleſſed Virgin in her turn ſaid, *How can this be, ſeeing I know not a man?* Iſaac was the *only* and *beloved ſon* of Abraham, as Chriſt was the only and beloved ſon of God. Iſaac was mocked by *Iſhmael*, the ſpurious offſpring of

* Gal. iii. 16, 17.

Abraham;

Abraham: Chriſt and the Chriſtians, his ſpiritual ſeed, were perſecuten by the unbelieving Jews, his natural children; and the apoſtle hath aſcertained the parallel, by arguing from one of theſe caſes to the other —*caſt out the bond-woman and her ſon*—that is, let *Jeruſalem*, with her children the Jews, in bondage under the elements of the law, be caſt out, like Hagar and her ſon, to the wide world, as unworthy of being admitted to the inheritance of the goſpel. Thus far the character of Iſaac was predictive or parabolical; and perhaps the relation might be farther perſued: but it will be better to confine our attention to the particular ſubject of our preſent enquiry.

XVIII. Iſaac was ſentenced to ſuffer by the hand of his father, who took the *fire* and *a knife* to ſlay him. And whence did the ſufferings of Chriſt proceed, but from the Father, *who ſpared not his own Son*, but *delivered him up for us all* to the ſword of juſtice and the fire of wrath; in which reſpects every burnt offering was a pledge and figure of his paſſion. But the hiſtory is yet more circumſtantial—*Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering, and laid it upon Iſaac his ſon, and they went both of them together.* Under the ſame circumſtan-

circumſtances did Chriſt go out to the mountain on which he was to be ſacrificed, bearing on his ſhoulders the wood of his own croſs; to which he was afterwards faſtened, as Iſaac was *bound*, and *laid on the altar upon the wood*. Each of them ſubmitted freely to the divine command: for Iſaac was of an age to have withſtood the perſuaſions of his father; and Chriſt, had he thought it good, might have called for more than twelve legions of angels to deliver him in the hour of darkneſs: nay, had he ſpoken the word, the heavens and the earth would have fled away like ſmoke before his face; but he became *obedient unto death*, even the death of the croſs.

XIX. If we proceed with the parallel, we find the one received from the dead *in a figure*, the other in reality. In the purpoſe of his father, Iſaac was devoted and ſacrificed: nay, an actual ſacrifice was offered, as Abraham had expected; but in the unexpected way of a ſubſtitution; and Iſaac was alive, as one who had ſurvived the fiery trial of the altar†. His

† The author of the Divine Legation of Moſes, vol. II. part ii. is of opinion, that by the offering of Iſaac Abraham was inſtructed in the final ſacrifice of Chriſt; while the permitted one of the Ram informed him of the intermediate ſacrifices of the Law. But this doth not appear, and may be thought

His father, in reflecting upon it, would naturally break forth into ſome expreſſion, to to the ſame effect with that of the father in the parable—*This my ſon was dead, and is alive again!*

With reſpect to the circumſtances of *time* and *place*, the two tranſactions agree in a wonderful manner. For it appears, that *Iſaac* was thus received from the dead on the *third day*. The ſacred hiſtory informs us (doubtleſs with ſome wiſe intention) that *on the third day* Abraham lift up his eyes, and ſaw afar off the place which God had appointed. On that ſame day, he laid him upon the altar, and received him from it alive, after he had been as good as dead in the eſtimation of his father for three days, according to the time of Chriſt's reſurrection. The *place* was on the mountains of Moriah; thoſe very mountains, on one of which our Lord Jeſus Chriſt was afterwards crucified. The city of Jeruſalem was built upon them: on the higheſt, which in 2 Chron. ch. iii. is expreſsly called by the name of *Mount Mo-*

thought too nice and refined an application of typical evidence. It ſeems more probable, that the *Reſurrection* of Jeſus Chriſt was principally foreſhewn in the perſon of Iſaac, and his *bloody Death* in the permitted ſacrifice of the Ram; ſo that by the conjunction of the two, the exhibition was complete.

riah, ſtood the holy Temple, in which the Lamb Chriſt Jeſus was figuratively offered for ſeveral hundred years in the daily ſacrifices of the Law; and Calvary, on which he was at length offered in perſon, though without the city walls, was a part in the chain of the mountains of *Moriah*. The Patriarch foreſeeing that the figurative offering and reſurrection of his ſon, would one day be there realized in the death and reſurrection of the Meſſiah, gave a name to the place in the ſpirit of prophecy, calling it *Jehovah jireh*, the *Lord will provide*; alluding to the words he had before uſed in anſwer to the expoſtulation of Iſaac, "My ſon, God will *provide himſelf a lamb* for a burnt offering:" which though they were then words meant of Iſaac himſelf, went over his head, and took place in the perſon of Chriſt. And the hiſtorian adds, that the place was thenceforward marked out for the obſervation of poſterity by a proverbial tradition—*as it is ſaid to this day, In the mount of the Lord it ſhall be ſeen.* But here the Engliſh verſion differs from the original, and from almoſt every tranſlation, commentator, and critic; who agree to render the words—*In this mountain the Lord ſhall provide*; that is, if we

we complete the ſentence—Shall provide himſelf *that Lamb* for an offering, which ſhall *take away the ſins of the world.*

XX. What I have farther to ſay upon the caſe is this: that if Abraham underſtood the ſcene we have been conſidering as an earneſt and figure of the Meſſiah's death and reſurrection, as he appears to have done by his own prophetical declaration; then the deſign of God in this whole affair needs no farther apology nor explanation. For now it is evident, that the hard taſk impoſed upon Abraham, inſtead of defeating the promiſe of God, as it ſeemed about to do, did not only enſure it more effectually, but was made alſo to exhibit the very manner in which it ſhould be accompliſhed. Such are the ways of God! In the creation of the natural world, he brought light out of darkneſs; and in the œconomy of the ſpiritual, life out of death. Here alſo, out of a dark and ſevere precept, which ſeemed to promiſe nothing but a ſcene of diſappointment and cruelty, he opened to the father of the faithful a lively proſpect of his future mercy in the redemption of mankind. From the iſſue of this tranſaction in particular, Abraham *ſaw the day* of Chriſt, *and was glad.*

XXI. If we proceed to moralize upon this ſubject, it will occur to us in the firſt place, that the ways of God are not like our ways: his purpoſes are brought to paſs by ſuch means, as ſeem to us the moſt unlikely of all others. While His eye is intent upon ſome future good, our proſpect is bounded by the preſent evil out of which it is to ariſe: and the wiſdom of the world is ready to deny the providence of God, if it cannot immediately reconcile its operations with its own prejudices and paſſions. If a moraliſt of the modern ſtamp had been in the place of Abraham, he muſt by his own rules have replied againſt God, and determined the precept unfit, unjuſt, and contrary to nature: for having no *faith*, he would have judged only according to what *appeared*. But if Abraham had judged thus, the event had been very different. Inſtead of being celebrated as the great example of faith and righteouſneſs, the progenitor of the Meſſiah, and the *friend of God*, he would probably have loſt his ſon ſome other way; would have been rejected as a perſon unfit for the bleſſings intended; and muſt have ſought his comfort amongſt the philoſophers of Babel.

XXII. The

XXII. The wiſe ſon of Sirach, well acquainted with the hiſtory of Abraham's probation, ſeems to have extracted from it this refined and excellent moral. "My ſon, if "thou come to ſerve the Lord, prepare thy "ſoul for *temptation*. Set thy heart aright, "and conſtantly endure, and make not haſte "in time of trouble. Cleave unto him and "depart not away, that thou mayeſt be in-"creaſed at thy laſt end. For *gold is tried* "*in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace* "*of adverſity*." Forewarned of this, no faithful diſciple ought to be ſurpriſed, if ſome trial is found for him now, as for Abraham of old: neither let him wonder if the matter of it ſhould be furniſhed by that treaſure, whatever it may be, upon which his heart is moſt fixed. For the affections may be ſhaken off from the world moſt powerfully, by the inſtrumentality of that which hath the faſteſt hold upon them. If he is wiſe, he will learn to truſt to God for an explanation of thoſe things, which at preſent may ſeem irreconcileable, either with the goodneſs of his nature, or the wiſdom of his providence.

XXIII. It is a leſſon to which fleſh and blood are ſtrangely averſe; yet on ſome prin-

ciple or other it muſt be admitted, that nothing is to be ſet in competition with God. Iſaac was to Abraham the greateſt ſupport and comfort of his life, the tendereſt object of his affection. Power, honour, and pleaſure had no allurements for him: he was content to live as a ſtranger upon earth, and to be expoſed to perils and affronts in an idolatrous inhoſpitable country. Yet this bleſſing he was ready to give up, ſo far as God ſhould require it, and in the manner he ſhould command. His faith did indeed aſſure him of an happy conſequence, when the courſe of the temptation ſhould be finiſhed. And thence all his children may learn, that it is impoſſible to be a loſer by ſubmitting to the commands of God. Abraham by venturing to loſe his ſon ſaved him: and he that will venture, on a parallel occaſion, to loſe even his life in this world, ſhall ſave it to life eternal.

XXIV. In the mean time, let him conſider for his comfort, that every inſtance of ſelf-denial will be found by experience to be much lighter than it appears. There may be difficulty and terror in the precept which enjoins it, but it ſhall vaniſh in the performance, as it did with Abraham. There was indeed a loſs of life; but how different, how

far

far inferior to that which he had dreaded! After he had expected to see the blood of his only son streaming upon the altar, and the flames consuming the object of his affection; he at last saw a brute animal expiring in his stead. And while we are fearing that our peace, our comfort, our happiness, our life, must all be sacrificed in obedience to the divine precepts; their severity will at last fall only upon the brutal part of us: that which is most dear and valuable to us will be preserved; and that only will be lost, which is not worth saving. This part of the moral is so elegantly touched by St. *Bernard*, that I shall give it the reader in his own words. " Tu igitur, si vocem Domini " audieris intus in animo, & dicatur tibi, " ut offeras Isaac, ut tuum quodcunque est " *gaudium* immoles Deo, (interpretatur enim " Isaac gaudium seu risus) fideliter & con- " stanter obedire ne timeas: securus esto: " non Isaac sed aries morietur: non peribit " tibi *lætitia* sed *contumacia*—Hæc vita est " sanctorum; tanquàm tristes, semper autem " gaudentes; *tanquam morientes, & ecce* " *vivimus*."

FINIS.